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EMPLOYEE CHARACTERISTICS AS PREDICTORS OF TURNOVER AMONG FEMALE--ETC(U)
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20. Abstract (continued)

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EMPLOYEE CHARACTERISTICS AS PREDICTORS OF TURNOVER
AMONG FEMALE CLERICAL EMPLOYEES IN TWO ORGANIZATIONS

Richard T. Mowday
University of Oregon

Lyman W. Porter
University of California, Irvine

Eugene F. Stone
Purdue University

Technical Report No. 9

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between employee characteristics and turnover in organizations. N=314 female clerical employees in two regional offices of a large insurance company were administered Jackson's (1967) Personality Research Form and a questionnaire that included measures of several demographic characteristics. Turnover data were collected up to eight months following the questionnaire administration. Multivariate relationships were found between employee characteristics and turnover in both samples. Compared with stayers, leavers in both offices were characterized by lower tenure in the company, a higher need for autonomy and a lower need for harmavoidance. Mixed support was found for the relationship between turnover and "extreme" personality characteristics hypothesized by Porter and Steers (1973). Several suggestions were made concerning the direction of future research on turnover.

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Employee Characteristics as Predictors of Turnover
Among Female Clerical Employees in Two Organizations

Reviews of the turnover literature (Brayfield & Crocket, 1955; Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson & Capwell, 1957; Pettman, 1973; Porter & Steers, 1973; Schuh, 1967; Vroom, 1964) have clearly established that characteristics of both the organization (e.g., organization-wide, immediate work environment and job content factors) and the individual employee (e.g., age, tenure, family size) are related to turnover in work organizations. Relative emphasis in previous research, however, appears to have been placed on investigating organizational determinants of withdrawal behavior. As a consequence, far less is known about the influence of personal characteristics of the individual employee with respect to the decision to remain with the organization.

One set of personal factors of considerable research interest concerns the personality characteristics of employees. While it would appear that the personality traits (e.g., need strengths) of the employee may play a major part in the decision whether to stay with or leave the organization, studies investigating the relationship between personality characteristics and turnover are limited in number.

In an early study, Hanna (1935) found that emotionally adjusted individuals demonstrated greater job stability than those classified as emotionally maladjusted. Age differences between the samples, however, may have confounded this relationship. Cleland and Peck (1959) found a relationship between turnover and authoritarianism among a sample of hospital ward attendants. Hakkinen and Toivainen (1960) studied miners on a

relatively hazardous job and found turnover was positively related to manifest anxiety and negatively related to emotional stability. In a large study of 1360 engineers cited by Pettman (1973) and Porter and Steers (1973), Meyer and Cuomo (1962) found leavers to be characterized by high achievement motivation, aggression, independence, self-confidence and sociability. On the other hand, stayers were characterized by emotional stability, maturity, sincerity, job identification and moderate achievement motivation. More recently, Hines (1973) found the need for achievement to be positively related to turnover for engineers, accountants and middle managers, but negatively related to turnover for "entrepreneurs." Mowday, Stone and Porter (Note 1) found turnover negatively related to the need for achievement and positively related to the need for affiliation for employees on high scope jobs, and negatively related to affiliation among employees on low scope jobs.

In contrast to the studies reported above, several investigations have found no relationship between measures of personality and turnover. Vincent and Dugan (1962) found turnover was unrelated to scales of either the Gordon or Wesman Personality Inventories for male insurance salesmen. In another study conducted among male insurance salesmen, Hedberg and Baxter (1957) found 9 of 10 scales of the Guilford-Zimmerman Personality Inventory unrelated to turnover. Finally, Robbins and King (1961) found no relationships between turnover and scales of the Bernreuter Personality Inventory.

Several problems associated with the previous research make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about how individual differences influence turnover. First, the general lack of standardization of personality measures across studies makes comparisons among studies difficult. The

mixed results which have been found in previous studies may, in part, be attributable to differences in the properties of the personality measures employed. Second, the absence of replication and/or cross-validation casts some doubt on the validity of results reported from studies involving single samples. Finally, multivariate methods of analysis generally have not been used in previous studies. When univariate tests are used to examine relationships between turnover and a number of intercorrelated personality measures, the probability of committing a type I error is increased. Consequently, relationships reported between turnover and personality may be overstated. In addition, the absence of multivariate methods of analysis makes it difficult to assess the independent influence of a given personality characteristic on variance in turnover.

Although the previous research is limited and characterized by mixed results and some methodological problems, the accumulated evidence suggests that stayers can be differentiated from leavers on the basis of certain personality traits. In a recent review of this literature, Porter and Steers (1973) concluded that turnover may be related to some "extreme" personality characteristics: "From the limited evidence available, a tendency appears to emerge for those employees who leave the organization to manifest characteristics near polar positions at either end of various personality trait continua" (p. 166). In other words, the largest proportion of leavers would be expected to manifest characteristics either high or low on a given personality dimension. Those who remain in the organization would be expected to cluster near the center of various personality dimensions. Porter and Steers (1973) suggest mean differences will be

found between stayers and leavers on various personality dimensions. Moreover, they indicate that leavers are more likely than stayers to deviate from what might be considered "average" or "normal" levels of personality traits.

The general purpose of this study was to examine relationships between employee characteristics and turnover in organizations. The major focus of the study was on employee personality characteristics. Several need strengths were predicted to differentiate between stayers and leavers: (1) achievement; (2) affiliation; (3) aggression; (4) autonomy; (5) endurance; (6) exhibition; (7) harmavoidance; (8) impulsivity; and (9) social recognition. Previous research has found that leavers tend to exhibit higher needs for achievement, affiliation, autonomy and aggression than stayers (Hines, 1973; Meyer & Cuomo, 1962; Mowday et al., Note 1). Based on descriptions of the need strengths provided by Jackson (1967), it was predicted that stayers would be characterized by relatively higher needs for endurance and social recognition. Leavers were predicted to exhibit relatively higher needs for exhibition and impulsivity and a lower need for harmavoidance. A secondary purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between turnover and "extreme" personality characteristics suggested by Porter and Steers (1973). Finally relationships between turnover and age, tenure in the company and level of educational attainment were investigated since previous research has found them to be related to staying or leaving (cf., Porter & Steers, 1973).

The study was designed to be carried out in two organizations to allow for replication of the results. The two organizations were regional offices of a large insurance company. Consequently, it was possible to hold

organization function and organization-wide policies relatively constant. In addition, only female employees engaged in similar clerical tasks within each office were sampled. In this way it was felt that several confounding sources of variance could be held to a minimum in interpreting the results.

Method

Research Settings

The two organizations studied were regional offices of a large national multi-line insurance corporation. Both offices were located on the West Coast and performed identical functions. Participants in the study were female employees engaged in similar clerical jobs within each office. The samples are briefly described below.

Insurance Office I. Study participants were employed on five clerical jobs: (1) file clerks ($N = 30$); (2) typist clerks ($N = 56$); (3) non-typist clerks ($N = 43$); (4) keypunch operators ($N = 14$); and (5) skilled assistants ($N = 14$). Study participants had a average age of 27 years and had been employed by the organization for an average of 58 months. A majority of the sample had a high school education. A total of 157 employees from Office I participated in the study.

Insurance Office II. The same five clerical jobs studied in the first Office were also studied in this sample. The number of employees on each job was: (1) file clerks ($N = 30$); typist clerks ($N = 49$); (3) non-typist clerks ($N = 59$); (4) keypunch operators ($N = 2$); and (5) skilled assistants ($N = 17$). The average age of study participants was 27 years and the average tenure in the company was 38 months. A majority of the employees studied

had a high school education. A total of 157 employees in Office II participated in the study.

Research Measures

Personality Research Form. Form A of Jackson's Personality Research Form (PRF) was used to measure the personality characteristics of study participants. The PRF was chosen for use because it appears to be one of the most rigorously developed and psychometrically sound personality instruments available (see Buros, 1972). Development of the PRF is described in detail by Jackson (1967). The design of the scales guards against the common response tendencies of acquiescence and social desirability. Jackson (1967) reported good convergent and discriminant validity for the scales. During instrument development, test-retest reliabilities over a one week period ranged from .77 to .90 and internal consistency of the scales ranged from .87 to .94.

Form A of the instrument measures 14 needs derived principally from the work of Murray (1938). The following needs were examined in this study: (1) achievement; (2) affiliation; (3) aggression; (4) autonomy; (5) endurance; (6) exhibition; (7) harmavoidance; (8) impulsivity; and (9) social recognition. Each of these needs is measured by 20 items representing statements that an individual may or may not use to describe himself (e.g., "I would like to have a job in which I didn't have to answer to anyone"). Responses are made on a true-false format.

Demographic Characteristics. Employees indicated their age, tenure in the company and level of educational attainment. Tenure in the company was measured in terms of months. Educational attainment was measured using

12 categories ranging from "6th grade education or less" to "some graduate work or advanced degree."

Turnover Data. Information concerning turnover was collected from company records approximately eight months after the administration of the PRF. Primary concern in this study was with individuals who either remained with the organization or voluntarily withdrew from the job. Several respondents were terminated by the organization and they were not included in the data analysis. Although it was possible to identify employees who voluntarily withdrew from the organization, information was not available concerning the specific reasons why employees resigned. Within the eight month period of the study, the rate of voluntary withdrawal was 14% and 20% for offices I and II, respectively.

Data Collection Procedures

Employee participated in the study on a voluntary basis. Questionnaire administrations were conducted by the researchers in group settings on company premises. Since the questionnaire package was rather lengthy, questionnaire administrations were conducted over a two day period. Employees were told the general purpose of the study and that individual responses would be held in the strictest confidence. Participants were asked to indicate their names on the questionnaires so that information from the two administrations could be matched. This also allowed for the subsequent collection of turnover information. In all but a very few cases, employees agreed to participate in the study and provide their names on the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Procedures

Within each organization, respondents were classified as either stayers

or leavers for purposes of analysis. Two primary analyses were performed on the data. First, to examine the overall multivariate relationships between employee characteristics and turnover, stepwise multiple regressions were run separately for each sample. It was felt that a stepwise procedure would provide the most parsimonious results by focusing attention on only those variables which contributed to the discrimination between stayers and leavers. These analyses allowed conclusions to be drawn concerning the overall relationship between turnover and the predictor variables (i.e., employee characteristics). In addition, the specific variables that discriminated between stayers and leavers in each sample could be identified.

The second analysis examined the extent to which leavers were characterized by "extreme" personality characteristics. Although the meaning of the term "extreme" is clear in the abstract, it is necessary to be more precise about the type of evidence needed to confirm the hypothesis that leavers exhibit "extreme" personality characteristics. One method of testing the hypothesis is to determine the extent to which stayers cluster near the center of a personality dimension and leavers significantly deviate from the mid-point. The best estimate of the center of a distribution is provided by normative data for the personality instrument collected from a large national sample. The mean for the national sample on a personality dimension can be considered the center of the distribution. Consequently, evidence in support of the "extreme" personality characteristics hypothesis would be found if: (1) the mean level on a personality dimension for leavers is significantly higher or lower than the mean for the national sample; and (2) there is no significant difference between the mean level on a personality dimension for stayers and the mean for the national sample.

Normative data for the personality instrument used in this study are

available from a national sample of $N = 1002$ female college students. Since a majority of the female clerical employees who participated in this study had only completed high school, caution must be taken in comparing the clerical employees with the normative sample. Jackson (1967) indicates, however, that summary statistics for non-college samples have been found to conform reasonably well with the college samples. Consequently, it was felt that comparing data for stayers and leavers with Jackson's (1967) normative data would provide an exploratory test of the "extreme" personality characteristics hypothesis.

Results

Means and standard deviations on each of the employee characteristic measures are presented for stayers and leavers in each sample in Table 1. The results are presented in two parts: (1) results of the analyses

Insert Table 1 About Here

examining the overall multivariate prediction of turnover; and (2) results of the analyses investigating relationships between "extreme" personality characteristics and turnover.

Overall Prediction of Turnover

Results of the multiple regression analyses are reported in Table 2. In each sample, a significant relationship was found between turnover and employee characteristics. The percentage of variance explained (R^2) by the multiple regressions was 19% and 9% for offices I and II, respectively. When the multiple correlations were corrected for shrinkage, these percentages were reduced to 12 and 5.

than the national sample on the need for endurance. Leavers exhibited a significantly lower need for social recognition in both offices, although stayers were also lower on this need in office I. Finally, leavers were significantly higher than the national sample on the need for autonomy in office I.

In interpreting the results of this analysis, it is important to recognize that differences in sample size between the stayer and leaver groups favored finding statistically significant differences between the national sample and stayers. Consequently, the small size of the leaver groups may account for the general failure to find significant differences between leavers and the national sample. Caution may therefore be necessary in interpreting the results of the t-tests. It was originally predicted, however, that the means for stayers would be more similar to the means of the national sample than would be the case for leavers. Contrary to this prediction, it was generally found that the magnitude of the differences between the means for stayers and the national sample were greater than differences found for leavers. As a result, it is difficult to conclude that leavers are more likely than stayers to exhibit "extreme" personality characteristics.

Discussion

The overall results of this study suggest that employee characteristics are predictive of turnover in organizations. The profile that emerges from these results suggests that leavers in both offices were more likely than stayers to be characterized by a high need for autonomy, a low need for harmavoidance, and, to a lesser extent, low tenure in the company. The

Standardized regression weights are presented for each variable that entered the stepwise solutions in Table 2. Three employee characteristics were found to differentiate between stayers and leavers in both samples. The needs for autonomy and harmavoidance were found to be significantly related to turnover in each office. The relationship between turnover and tenure in the organization approached significance in both offices. As predicted, leavers exhibited a higher need for autonomy and a lower need for harmavoidance than stayers (cf., Table 1). Leavers in both offices also had less tenure in the company than stayers.

"Extreme" Personality Characteristics and Turnover

To examine the prediction that leavers would exhibit "extreme" levels on the personality dimensions, the means for stayers and leavers on each personality measure were compared with the mean for the national sample of female college students. Comparisons between stayers and leavers in each office and the national sample were made by t-tests.

The results presented in Table 3 do not provide clear support for the prediction that leavers are more likely than stayers to exhibit

Insert Table 3 About Here

"extreme" personality characteristics. Although stayers were predicted to cluster near the center of the personality distributions, a larger number of significant differences were found between the mean personality characteristics for stayers and the national sample than was true for leavers. In both offices, stayers were found to exhibit significantly lower needs for impulsivity and exhibition and a higher need for harmavoidance than the national sample. Both stayers and leavers were significantly higher

finding that leavers had lower tenure in the company is consistent with the results of a number of previous studies (cf., Porter & Steers, 1973). As tenure in the organization increases, employees are likely to build up a number of "investments" that may increase the costs associated with turnover. In addition, employees who remain in organizations for a "long" period of time may specialize in organization specific roles (Salancik, 1977). Such specialization may decrease the probability of finding suitable positions in other organizations.

The finding that female clerical employees who left the insurance offices had a higher need for autonomy than those who remained can be explained by considering the nature of the clerical jobs studied. File clerks and typist clerks are likely to have relatively low amounts of autonomy and discretion associated with their jobs. Consequently, employees with a high need for autonomy may find such jobs dissatisfying and thus have a greater propensity to leave. More research is needed to clarify the influence of the need for autonomy on turnover in various types of jobs (cf., Mowday et al., Note 1).

The finding that stayers were more likely than leavers to exhibit a high need for harmavoidance may reflect individual risk taking propensities. A high need for harmavoidance is described by Jackson (1967) as a tendency to avoid risks and to be overly cautious, careful, fearful and self-protecting. Such individuals may be unwilling to assume the potential risks involved in leaving a job (e.g., uncertainties associated with finding a new position and unknown characteristics of other jobs). The relationship between turnover and the need for harmavoidance may be particularly pronounced when the economy is in a recession and the number of alternative jobs is greatly reduced.

When such economic conditions exist, employees with a high need for harmavoidance may be very unlikely to voluntarily leave the organization. During the period in which data were collected for this study, the economy was in a general slowdown brought about by a "energy crisis."

An exploratory test of the relationship between turnover and "extreme" personality characteristics did not provide clear support for the conclusions reached by Porter and Steers (1973) in their review of the literature. As predicted, leavers significantly differed from the national sample on several need strength measures. Contrary to predictions, however, a number of differences were also found between the personality characteristics of stayers and the national sample. In several instances, leavers were more similar to the national sample than were stayers. These findings suggest that both stayers and leavers may deviate from "average" levels of personality. Whether stayers or leavers exhibit "extreme" personality characteristics may depend upon the particular personality trait in question.

It is important to recognize the relationships examined in this study provide only a rough test of the "extreme" personality characteristics hypothesis stated by Porter and Steers (1973). Differences in level of educational attainment between the clerical employees and the normative sample suggest the results must be interpreted with caution. Although these differences were not judged to be great, they may have influenced the results. In addition, it is important to consider the way in which "extreme" personality characteristics were defined in this study (i.e., significant differences from the mean of the normative sample). Even though a number of such differences were found to exist, the strength of the relationships as measured by omega-square were quite small. Consequently, it is not clear whether the

personality traits exhibited by employees in these offices were "extreme" in any absolute sense. More research is clearly needed to determine the impact of "extreme" personality characteristics on turnover. The results of this study, however, suggest that future research should consider the possibility that either stayers or leavers may exhibit "extreme" personality characteristics.

Several conclusions and directions for future research are suggested from the results of this study. The overall findings suggest that employee characteristics represent an important component of comprehensive models of the turnover process. When the nature of the job and organization-wide policies were held relatively constant, it was possible to distinguish between stayers and leavers based on certain employee characteristics. This suggests that future research on turnover must consider individual differences as well as differences in organizational work experiences. Rather than view employee characteristics and organizational factors as independent sets of predictors of turnover (cf., Porter & Steers, 1973), future research may contribute more to our understanding of the turnover process if interactions between these sets of variables are investigated. Previous research has made a contribution by finding relationships between turnover and various employee characteristics or organizational practices. What appears to be needed now, however, are more sophisticated investigations in which the propensity to leave is viewed as a result of complex interactions between individual difference factors and characteristics of the job, immediate work environment, larger organization and economic environment. Several previous studies have investigated such employee characteristics-job characteristics interactions (for a review of these studies see Schneider, 1975). More research of this type is needed if we are to expand our understanding of the turnover process in organizations.

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1. Mowday, R. T., Stone, E. F., & Porter, L. W. The influence of job scope on the personality-turnover relationship. (Tech. Rep. No. 8).
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Footnote

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Requests for reprints should be sent to Richard T. Mowday, College of Business Administration, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403.

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Stayers and Leavers
On Personality and Demographic Measures

Employee Characteristics	Insurance Office I		Insurance Office II	
	Stayers	Leavers	Stayers	Leavers
Demographic Characteristics				
Age	28.4 (10.2)	22.6 (6.2)	27.0 (9.4)	25.3 (7.9)
Tenure in Company	65.1 (66.6)	21.4 (29.3)	40.4 (45.8)	25.8 (22.1)
Education	7.6 (1.1)	7.3 (.7)	7.5 (1.3)	7.6 (1.0)
Personality Characteristics				
Achievement	12.6 (3.5)	11.8 (2.8)	12.6 (3.2)	12.3 (3.2)
Affiliation	14.8 (3.0)	15.1 (3.3)	16.0 (2.3)	15.4 (3.4)
Aggression	4.7 (2.8)	6.1 (3.8)	5.6 (2.9)	5.1 (3.6)
Autonomy	6.5 (3.0)	8.6 (3.6)	6.5 (2.8)	7.9 (2.7)
Endurance	12.5 (3.7)	12.2 (3.1)	12.5 (3.6)	12.1 (3.4)
Exhibition	7.3 (3.6)	10.6 (4.4)	8.9 (3.9)	8.8 (4.5)
Harmavoidance	13.3 (3.8)	10.1 (4.1)	11.9 (4.0)	9.8 (5.6)
Impulsivity	8.9 (3.1)	9.8 (3.2)	9.4 (3.4)	10.3 (3.9)
Social Recognition	9.9 (3.4)	9.4 (3.4)	11.1 (3.3)	9.8 (3.7)
Sample Size ^a	134	19	128	25

^aReduced sample size due to missing responses.

TABLE 2

Standardized Regression Weights and Summary Statistics
for Regression Analyses

	Insurance Office I	Insurance Office II
Demographic Characteristics		
Age	-.09	
Tenure in Company	.18*	.10*
Education	.05	
Personality Characteristics		
Achievement	.17*	
Affiliation	-.08	.06
Aggression	-.11	.18**
Autonomy	-.17**	-.17**
Endurance	.01	.12*
Exhibition	-.21***	
Harmavoidance	.16**	.15**
Impulsivity	.10	
Social Recognition	.02	
Summary Statistics		
R	.44***	.30**
R ²	.19	.09
Corrected R ²	.12	.05

Note. No weight is reported when a variable did not enter the stepwise solution.

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .01$

TABLE 3

Differences between Mean Personality Characteristics
for Stayers and Leavers and Means for a National Sample^a

	Insurance Office I		Insurance Office II	
	Stayers	Leavers	Stayers	Leavers
Achievement	-.31 (.00)	-.49 (.00)	-.31 (.00)	-.01 (.00)
Affiliation	-1.35** (.02)	-1.05 (.001)	-.15 (.00)	-.75 (.00)
Aggression	-1.16** (.01)	.24 (.00)	-.26 (.00)	-.76 (.00)
Autonomy	-.58 (.002)	1.52* (.003)	-.58 (.002)	.82 (.00)
Endurance	2.39** (.05)	2.09* (.005)	2.39** (.05)	1.99* (.01)
Exhibition	-2.44** (.04)	.86 (.00)	-.84* (.004)	-.94 (.00)
Harmavoidance	3.04** (.05)	.17 (.00)	1.63** (.01)	-.47 (.00)
Impulsivity	-1.40** (.02)	-.50 (.00)	-.90** (.005)	.00 (.00)
Social Recognition	-1.42** (.02)	-1.92* (.004)	-.22 (.00)	-1.52* (.003)

Note. Positive difference indicate mean for national sample was less than observed mean for stayers or leavers. Means for national sample are reported in Jackson (1967).

^aOmega-squared reported in parentheses.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

